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STUDY MADE OF OUR MIGRANT SHOREBIRDS IN SOUTH AMERICA

In view of additional protection recently accorded shorebirds in this country by amendment to the regulations under the migratory-bird treaty act, a new bulletin just issued by the United States Department of Agriculture--"Our Migrant Shorebirds in Southern South America"--is of special significance. Many of the birds migrating between the United States and Canada and protected under the treaty make extended journeys each year and winter in southern South America.

Of the many species of North American shorebirds, there are only 12 that do not visit South America part of the year, and no fewer than 24 species pass as far south as Argentina and Chile. In spite of ample protection during their breeding season, many of these birds had been decreasing in numbers to such an alarming extent that the Bureau of Biological Survey sent Dr. Alexander Wetmore, author of the new bulletin, and now assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, to South America to investigate the conditions encountered by our shorebirds in their winter homes.

Legislation for the protection of birds in the republics of southern South America, it was found, is in somewhat the same stage as in the United States 30 years ago. A number of conservation laws have been placed on the statute books, but the public generally has not as yet been educated sufficiently to their observance. This laxity, says Doctor Wetmore, is due partly to the fact that extensive settlement and development, with consequent excessive hunting, has been comparatively recent, and partly to the large proportion of colonists from the south of Europe, in parts of which killing is still a sanctioned custom and where sentiment for the protection of birds, particularly the smaller species, is notably wanting. Consequently, a number of the most valuable and desirable of the shorebirds that seek winter homes in South America are being destroyed in inordinate numbers, a condition that renders ineffective to a certain degree the protection afforded them in this country and Canada.

Copies of the report of the investigations (Technical Bulletin 26-T) may be obtained from the United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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